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AUTHOR Stevens, Mary A.
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ABSTRACT

Community forums, based on newspaper courses operating as part of the Black Hawk College (Illinois) university parallel program, were completely planned, administered, and executed by the college humanities faculty in cooperation with community co-sponsors. In most cases, the cooperative efforts represented new official ties between college and community, although in many cases the community groups were approached by faculty who were already group members. Cooperating organizations included the River Bend Library System and such special interest groups as the American Association of University Women, Churches United, and Parents without Partners, as well as social and civic, age, and labor groups. The model forums involved the following components: a discussion series based on the fall 1977 national newspaper course, "Crime and Justice in America", offered for college credit; an introductory workshop to announce the project through the news media and provide all community co-sponsors an opportunity to meet; the adoption of the "town meeting" format for discussions at which a faculty member served as moderator and was joined by citizen experts; a panel of local experts (a social worker, an attorney, and a police officer) who attended discussions, reviewed meeting results, developed a set of recommendations, and presented them in a series of television tapes. Plans for future forums are reviewed. (TR)

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COURSE BY NEWSPAPER COMMUNITY FORUMS AT BLACK HAWK COLLEGE

By

Mary A. Stevens
Professor of English
Black Hawk College
Moline, Illinois

TC 780 298

A Presentation at the Fifty-Eighth Annual Convention of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, April 9-12, 1978, Atlanta, Georgia, Forum 16, "Courses by Newspaper Community Forums: Early Results of the National Demonstration Program."

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Legend has it that good instruction began with Socrates. Without the assurance provided by tenure, health and dental insurance, academic freedom, and a campus support staff and denied such customary amenities as campus office, university club, library and computer, without even podium or chalkboard --to the modern imagination at least--Socrates moved about his community, clad in dusty academic garb, with eyes diverted in studious contemplation toward his feet. Because he had not read Bloom and knew nothing of modern research on learning theory, he had to rely upon the simple Socratic method--a carefully planned series of penetrating questions leading to truth. His classes were in the form of discussions, and they took place wherever he happened to be. Thus, in Socrates' day, education was not institutionalized: it was community-based and took the form of dialogue. It resulted from Socrates' conviction that even the simplest ordinary man could reach high to new awareness and knowledge.

I construct this rather elaborate metaphor because, first of all, I am an English teacher, and, secondly, I believe there are many similarities between education in the Socratic manner and the type of community forums that we have been

creating this year as national models based upon Courses by Newspaper.

[The rest of the presentation was a slide/cassette program, the content of which is summarized below.]

THE SETTING

Established in 1946 as Moline Community College, an extension of the University of Illinois, today Black Hawk College is a comprehensive, two-campus, Illinois public community college. Each year it serves about 19,000 individuals from a service population of about 250,000. Located more or less west of Chicago on the Mississippi River, the college's district is a sprawling one, stretching approximately 70 miles from east to west and 50 miles from north to south and including approximately 2200 square miles. The Quad-Cities Campus is located in Moline, Illinois, which prides itself upon being "The Farm Implement Capital of the World." Our other campus in Kewanee is located in a rural area claiming the distinction of being the "Hog Capital of the World."

THE ACTORS

At Black Hawk College, the planning, administration, and execution of our model community forums was placed entirely in the hands of the humanities faculty. Our project operated as a part of our most legitimate and prestigious university parallel program through one of its divisions, whose chairman was site director. To assist the site director and the faculty humanists there was forum staff: a town meeting coordinator, and her assistant.

A number of external forces operated upon our project: Washington project headquarters, the subject matter community experts, including representatives of local police departments, the panelists and local news media. However, the most important of all these external forces were our community co-sponsors. There were 28 such groups that provided free meeting space, refreshments, publicity, and community experts.

First, there was the River Bend Library System and six of its member public libraries. Since 1975, Black Hawk College has been involved with these libraries in a cooperative program called "Study Unlimited" to offer college courses off-campus. They joined the community forums because sponsoring community discussions is a high priority to our local library district. I also suspect that they joined because they had found that their former associations with us had not been dangerous ones.

Second, there were community organizations. In most cases, these cooperative efforts represent new official ties between college and community, although in many cases we approached groups through those faculty who were members of the group. Included were special interest groups, such as the American Association of University Women, Churches United, the Rock Island County Council on Alcoholism, Parents without Partners, and the Silvis P.T.A. There were organizations whose objectives relate to the promotion and recognition of their

groups, such as the National Organization for Women and the Center for Belgium Culture. Social and civic groups, such as the Moline's Women's Club and the Silvis Businessmen's Club. Age groups, such as the Kewanee Senior Citizens. Social and civic groups, such as the Quad-City Council on Crime and Delinquency and Project NOW. Labor groups, such as the UAW Cap Council, possible because our project was entirely faculty-based and our AFT local has established good and formal relations with local labor.

After the forums started other community groups and governmental units assisted--the AFL-CIO, local law enforcement agencies, the Bi-State Metropolitan Planning Commission, the states attorney's office, sheriffs and state policemen, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Black Hawk College Student Representative Assembly--the list could go on and on. Many of these community co-sponsors joined the project because of their close associations with local public libraries, which were already cooperating.

THE PARTS

Our community forums were characterized by the following components.

The discussion series was based upon this fall's national Course by Newspaper--"Crime and Justice in America," which we offered for college credit. Essays relating to this course

were carried in the Rock Island Argus and the Kewanee Star-Courier. Each week the site director wrote a parallel essay that provided the local perspective on the topic of the national essay. Discussion topics related to these essays; course materials were available in area libraries for those interested, and copies of national essays were distributed at forums.

Another important component of our model was the introductory workshop on September 7--to announce the project to the community through local news media and to provide an opportunity for all community co-sponsors to meet. At this meeting, two mayors, a state senator, two state representatives, the local Belgian consel, and two newspaper editors joined us.

Our community discussions were deliberately called "town meetings," for they were gatherings of concerned citizens speaking freely to reach consensus. Originally, we planned to hold five town meetings. One was added in the city of Kewanee to include the area of our other campus. Three were added at the request of interested co-sponsoring groups. We could have just gone on and on holding town meetings, but we stopped at nine. At each meeting, a faculty member teaching in the humanities served as moderator and he or she was joined by citizen experts--law enforcement officers, industrial security men, lawyers, social workers, judges, grade school principals, and the like. We received most generous help from these experts and know that we could not have held the type of discussions that we did without them.

Each meeting was unique, but here are three typical ones:

A discussion of "Law, Liberty, and Law Enforcement," at the Mineral-Gold Public Library, in Mineral, Illinois--population 300, attendance 18. The town has no policeman, no attorney, no social agency, no church, not even a tavern. The only reason that we were there was the public library. This meeting sought to explain the criminal justice system, and we had to import our panel of local experts.

A discussion of "Rape" at the Rock Island Y.W.C.A., at an open meeting of the National Organization for Women. Attendance: 74. News coverage, extensive.

"Proposed Revisions in the Illinois Criminal Code"--the only meeting held on campus and jointly held with the Quad-City Council on Crime and Delinquency and Churches United. Attendance: 48. This town meeting was broadcast live over cable television by the college's educational television studio. Faculty moderator was Larry Lorensen, mayor of Moline and professor in the college's department of history and government. Panelists included a representative of a civic group from Chicago, a local judge, the state's attorney, a representative of the Bi-State Metropolitan Planning Commission, and a representative from the governor's office, who flew in on a state plane for the meeting.

Town meetings were scheduled from September 30 through November 17. Then, another project component took over--a

panel of three local experts, a social worker, an attorney, and a police officer. These three had attended and participated in the town meetings. They also received written summaries and recommendations from each moderator. With the discussions over, they met to deliberate upon the results, and, based upon them, to develop a set of responsible recommendations for local improvement. Thus, our project attempted to move from discussion into action. These recommendations were then presented by the panelists and others in a series of four television tapes for local cable and open air commercial television and were mailed to public officials. Videocassette copies of the broadcasts were also available for individual or group viewing in public libraries.

Officially, our community forum on "Crime and Justice in America" ended with our written report. But the forums are not yet really over. Co-sponsors still call with news from time to time; the college nurse has called for information on social agencies--in other words, within the college, we have become a sort of expert on one part of the community, and we've seemed to grow closer to the community as a whole. The police officer who was a panelist held his own town meeting in January to find out citizens' attitudes toward police protection in his city. He liked the town meeting format.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
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JUL 21 1978

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
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We've all said, "If only I could do it over...." This spring, through a grant from the Illinois Humanities Council with funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Black Hawk College is doing so--a community forum on "The Impact of Mass Media on American Life," based upon this spring's Course by Newspaper "Popular Culture: Mirror of American Life." Many parts of this project remain the same as last fall, but we have also learned a lot. There will be fewer community co-sponsors with more clearly defined responsibilities; an advisory committee to plan the project, including both the faculty discussion moderators and representatives from all co-sponsors; a training workshop to prepare our faculty humanists for their debuts into the community; more attention to alternative formats for discussions; six town meetings and four film showings/discussions, all in the evening in attractive meeting places; and better use of local public schools and community groups to generate audience.

At Black Hawk College, there were three major objectives for these forums: to involve the regular faculty in community-based cooperation, to demonstrate that the humanities faculty can serve as a genuine community resource in stimulating thought and action, and to provide attractive humanities programming for adults. We judge that we have accomplished these objectives. In addition, we have reconfirmed our own conviction that the humanities are still relevant and meaningful to life.

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